



In 1992, the then Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) expanded to include all the newly independent States of the former Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan. At the time of joining the CSCE, the five young states of Central Asia faced challenges stemming from recent independence and transition. Gradually, the CSCE and later the OSCE increased its involvement in the region by establishing presences in each of the five Central Asian states.

WHAT IS THE OSCE CENTRE IN ASTANA?

MANDATE AND COMPOSITION

Welcoming the willingness of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to intensify OSCE activities in the country the OSCE Permanent Council passed the Decision No. 243 as of 23 July 1998 on the establishment of an OSCE Centre in Almaty.

By the same decision, the Centre was entrusted with its first mandate, covering all three classic OSCE dimensions, with special emphasis on the regional context, including the economic, environmental, human and political aspects of security and stability.

The Centre started working in Almaty in January 1999. A small liaison office was set up in Astana in March 2003.

In light of the increased activities in the Kazakhstan's capital and the need to maintain and develop closer contacts with the central authorities and other partners, on 21 June 2007, the OSCE Permanent Council adopted a new mandate and renamed the Centre to the OSCE Centre in Astana. The Centre is fully operational in Astana, being also represented in Almaty through a Liaison Office.

The Centre staff comprises of the Head of Centre, who is assisted by his Deputy, four international officers and a team of national experts, covering politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimension issues.



The Permanent Council decision provided the Centre with a broad and open-ended mandate, the implementation of which is subject to annual review.

The current mandate, expanded and reaffirmed in November 2008, includes the following tasks:

- Promoting the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments, as well as co-operation of Kazakhstan in all three OSCE dimensions within the Organization's framework approach to co-operative security and in the regional context;
- Assist in arranging OSCE regional events, visits to the area by OSCE delegations, as well as other events with OSCE participation;
- Establish and maintain contacts with authorities, academic community and NGOs;
- Provide assistance to the Government of Kazakhstan, such as - raising awareness on OSCE activities, training of designated Kazakh officials, and providing advice on the OSCE to relevant official structures, facilitate information exchange between OSCE institutions and relevant state agencies;
- Perform other tasks deemed appropriate by the Chairman-in-Office, Secretary

General or OSCE institutions and agreed between Kazakhstan and the OSCE.

Following the mandate, the Centre conducts its programmatic activities based on Annual Program Outlines developed under close consultation with the host country and the OSCE Institution. The Centre supports Kazakhstan in promoting OSCE values and principles, facilitates security and confidence building measures within the OSCE area, transparent economic and environmental policy and the implementation of human rights in line with the OSCE commitments.

In doing so, the Centre enjoys hospitality of the Republic of Kazakhstan and excellent working relations with the authorities and civil society at all levels, based upon an open dialogue, partnership and mutual respect.

POLITICO-MILITARY ISSUES

The Centre consistently maintains confidence and security building measures (CSBM), combating terrorism, border security and police activities. To enhance effectiveness at the regional level, the Centre frequently co-operates with other OSCE field missions in the Central Asia. The activities performed by the Centre are co-ordinated and supported by relevant units in the OSCE Secretariat, such as Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), OSCE Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), and other specialized OSCE institutions and units.

The Centre continues to support Kazakhstan in promoting CSBM regime in line with the relevant OSCE documents, including Vienna Document 1999, Information Exchange on Conventional Arms Transfer and the Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Over the last years, a series of trainings for military personnel were organized by the Centre in cooperation with the Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense and OSCE Secretariat. For 2009, the Centre scheduled training on Vienna Document 1999 and the Regional conference on Effective Stockpile Management and Securing Small Arms and Light Weapons and Conventional Ammunition.

In cooperation with the Kazakh Interior Ministry, the Centre together with the SPMU has designed a Police Development Co-operation Project. The main focus of outlined activities are further democratization of police, development of community policing, as well as the inclusion of civil society into public oversight of police activities. Additionally, Centre co-operates with the law enforcement agencies on the issues of combating drug trafficking, counter terrorism, and organized crime issues. For the border security and management projects, the Centre works together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), EU Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), and with the Border Service of Kazakhstan. Within the framework of this cooperation, since 2007 Centre supports a series of annual specialized trainings for border guards of Kazakhstan.

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

A well-adjusted economy and an integrated approach to environmental protection are essential factors for ensuring a stable social and economic development and reducing the risk of possible social tensions. In the economic and environmental dimension, the Centre is focusing its activities on promoting good governance and addressing threats to environmental security. It assists Kazakhstan in building democratic and transparent institutions based on the rule of law and the principles of sustainable development.

In the economic field, the Centre is prioritizing support to the development of a legal and administrative framework to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism, according to international standards and recommendations. A second priority is anti-corruption, where the Centre provides assistance to the implementation of the National Programme on Anti-Corruption 2006-2010 with training, legal assessments, provision of international best practices and by facilitating the participation of Kazakhstani experts in international anti-corruption networks. The Centre also supports Kazakhstan in the field of migration governance and facilitates the development of regional co-operation on customs procedures and transportation networks.

In the environmental field, the Centre is supporting the implementation of international environmental conventions, in particular with regard to transboundary environmental co-operation and access to environmental information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters. The Centre is actively supporting pilot projects between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on improving the co-operation on shared water resources and on environmental impact assessments. Guidelines for public hearings on environmental issues have been elaborated and are now widely used on real cases in Kazakhstan's regions.

The Centre has conducted several projects on raising environmental awareness, for example by introducing curricula on education for sustainable development into the system for higher education and by conducting summer courses for teenagers from the Aral Sea region and the Caspian Sea region. Particular attention has been given to raising awareness on radiological safety in the Semipalatinsk region.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Respect for human rights is a crucial prerequisite for developing a democratic society and maintaining security and stability. Education and awareness-raising on human rights help ensure that citizens know their rights and how to protect them.

Following Kazakhstan's ratification of international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2005, the Centre assists the country in their implementation through conferences, roundtables, training and monitoring. In co-operation with the ODIHR and non-governmental organizations, the Centre supported the publication of analyses and recommendations on legal and judicial reforms, the humanization of places of detention, criminal and administrative policy and legislation, freedom of religion and shared them with state bodies. In 2005-2007, over 1,000 court sessions were monitored throughout the country under projects which monitored the observation of fair trial standards in criminal cases. In co-operation with academia, the State Academy for Civil Service, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, NGOs and the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, the Centre presents overviews on the OSCE Human Dimension commitments and human rights activities conducted by the Centre.

Jointly with ODIHR and international NGOs, the Centre has conducted workshops on monitoring women's rights in Kazakhstan, including the participation of women in politics and public life, anti-trafficking, rural women and violence against women. In co-operation with ODIHR, local experts the main national institutions, the Centre assists Kazakhstan in improving and adopting legislation on equal rights and opportunities and on combating domestic violence.

The Centre supports Kazakhstan in its efforts to combat trafficking in human beings. In co-operation with the ODIHR and the Secretariat, the Centre has organized roundtables, meetings and supported the participation of government agencies, law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations in conferences, seminars and training on best practices on the investigation and prosecution of traffickers and the protection of victims. Accent has been put on strengthening cooperation between officials and NGOs, which is key to effectively combat this problem.



ELECTIONS

Since open and transparent elections is an important element of democratization that can increase trust in the political system, the Centre is working closely together with Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission, political parties and civil society representatives to promote OSCE standards in this field.

On the eve of the 2007 Parliamentary Elections, the Centre supported a number of election-related activities, including training-seminars for local observers and two publications: a Guide for journalists how to cover elections and a Guide for the future voters.

Whereas, the Centre is not directly involved in the monitoring of the polls, as this is the mandate of the ODIHR and its Election Observation Missions, it actively supports co-operation between the OSCE/ODIHR and the Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan. This co-operation mainly focuses on the reform of Kazakhstan's election legislation in line with the OSCE commitments in the field of democratic elections and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

FREEDOM OF MEDIA

The Centre promotes the independence and freedom of the media in Kazakhstan and follows developments in this field. It co-operates with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on addressing infringements of the freedom of media and expression, as well as on problems encountered by journalists in pursuing their profession.

Since the very beginning of its presence in the country, the Centre closely cooperates with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Ministry of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan. It supports the development of Kazakhstani media legislation in line with international standards, and assists in commissioning legal expertises when necessary.

The Centre also promotes professional training for journalists, which includes media and labour legislation courses for journalism students, training courses on

covering the work of Parliament, journalism techniques and the use of Internet as a research resource.

CO-OPERATION WITH OSCE INSTITUTIONS

The Centre provides support to the OSCE Chairmanship and its institutions, including the Secretariat and its units, the Parliamentary Assembly, the ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

This role includes consulting and assistance in the implementation of a wide range of projects and providing logistical support for visits by representatives of these institutions to Kazakhstan. This co-operation covers all OSCE dimensions and spheres of activity.

CO-OPERATION WITH LOCAL PARTNERS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Centre promotes OSCE standards and commitments within Kazakhstan, closely co-operating in this respect with state institutions. The Centre's main point of contact is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, it also maintains contact with other ministries, Parliament, the Ombudsman office and specialized agencies such as the Presidential Human Rights Commission, the Central Election Commission, the National Environmental Centre, and the Presidential National Commission on Women's Affairs, Family and Demographic Policy.

The Centre also works closely with non-governmental structures, especially with environmental, business and human rights NGOs. It co-ordinates its activities with the diplomatic presences of OSCE participating States in Kazakhstan, as well as with other international organizations such as the European Union and various United Nations agencies. With regard to issues requiring an inter-governmental approach, the Centre seeks to facilitate regional co-operation among the Central Asian states, in conjunction with the other OSCE offices in the region.

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